

1.—Australian Aborigines: Research and Welfare

Presidential Address, 1973

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Abstract

Reference to an article in the first issue of this *Journal* points up changes in Aboriginal living conditions and in Australian society generally, and also in research methods. The main features of traditional Aboriginal society are outlined. They influenced the Aborigines' reactions to the European invaders as well as *vice versa*. Only when these features were modified was rapprochement possible, but it was a one-way process. Today, despite appearances to the contrary, the Aborigines are actually more dependent on others than ever before, and welfare policies and practice take even less account of solid research findings. Moreover, the new Aboriginal identity is being shaped in a context where the traditional past is a source of inspiration but provides few guide lines for the future.

I

A presidential address is not intended simply to illuminate a particular topic from the angle of a particular academic discipline. It should also say something about the contribution of the Society (in this case, the Royal Society of W.A.) in relation to that topic. It is interesting therefore to note that when this Society emerged (in 1914) from the Natural History and Science Society, under the guiding hand of Professor W. J. Dakin, Vol. I of its *Journal and Proceedings* for 1914-15 contained an article on Sunday Island by W. D. Campbell and W. H. Bird (1916: 55-82). Bird was a teacher at the mission settlement which had been established among the Bard people in 1899. It is not a professional anthropological contribution, but it points up obliquely some of the things I shall be talking about. For instance, it underlines the tremendous changes in research methods that have taken place over the years. It reflects the contrast between then and now in another sense too. The small, quiet settlement at Sunday Island was run primarily on private funds, with a government allowance of blankets and ninepence per day for the aged and infirm. The State Education Department made a grant of £100 a year to the mission school.

In that span of almost sixty years, it is as if another world has been superimposed on the old, but in such a way that the old one has not been entirely eradicated—at least, not yet. In general, those years have seen much fluctuation both in policies and in practice. They have also seen the movement of Aborigines from being an inarticulate, almost invisible minority, to a vociferous, highly visible and expanding population.

One focus of attention in this State, both then and now, has been the economic activities

of the Bard. As Campbell and Bird noted, these people were concerned with marine products. Today, the Ecology Unit under Commonwealth financial support and guidance is endeavouring to establish a turtle-farming venture, because the Bard are heavily dependent on outside help. But in 1914 and before, they were economically viable, with their pearlshell and *bêche-de-mer* fishing. The theme of outside concern is the same, but the local circumstances are not.

II

If the gap between the early Bard example and the contemporary situation is so considerable, the gap between traditional Aboriginal life and what survives now, not only among the Bard but also more generally, is even wider. We could almost say that it was a world apart from Aboriginal life as it exists today.

Aside from the question of attitudes on the part of early European settlers toward non-Europeans in general, attitudes which are fairly well documented, the immense difference in lifestyles between the newcomers and the Aborigines made any real rapprochement between them very difficult indeed, if not actually impossible. These difficulties became increasingly evident soon after initial contact, as both peoples became more conscious of pervasive incompatibilities. They have been modified only through an ironing-out or blurring of traditional Aboriginal elements. For a long time, these differences were seen as a contrast between "civilized" and "uncivilized", between "sophisticated" and "primitive" man. But this was a biased and faulty interpretation, one that could not stand up to closer scrutiny. Traditional Aboriginal societies and cultures were highly complex. Their members were ordinary, intelligent human beings, guided by their own belief systems and their accepted behavioural patterns. The organization of their societies was different from ours, and so were their values: their aims were not the same. The positive qualities of their way of life were not immediately obvious to outsiders who were used to a very dissimilar social and economic setting, with its stress on material goods and its thing-oriented technology.

The Aborigines were on the whole a deeply religious people. Religious feeling was manifested through ritual observance and through mythic expression: it was really something that was taken for granted. In essence, it was based on a deep and emotional attachment to the land. That land was to them full of signs, which had a direct relevance to socio-economic living.

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It was a land made familiar and intimate to them through mythic beings who were believed to be manifested at specific sites, beings who were believed to be always present and to be approachable through the medium of ritual. These were eternal or enduring elements, underlining continuity sustained through religious practice. They emphasized the fundamental unity of the human and the natural-physical environment, a kind of empathy between man and all natural species and phenomena. Everything was, at one conceptual level, brought together into one expanded socio-cultural environment, so that man was not seen as opposed to nature but as working in harmony with it. This was expressed through the concept of the Dreaming, as it is sometimes called in translation, in which all the most significant aspects of life were believed to have been set in motion by the primary mythic and spirit beings. The deities were manifested through man, and other living things and other features were selected as intermediaries or symbolic representations: all drew on the same life force. This particular relationship to the land and all within it was phrased as a total dependence upon it: and the way this was wrapped up in socio-cultural terms provided an emotional assurance that helped people to cope with such natural crises as drought or floods, and the human crisis of physical death. It was a screen between them and the stark reality of such crises, helping them to feel that their survival did not rest solely on their skills, their few weapons and techniques: the mythic beings stood protectively between them and any potential disaster, as a buffer or an intermediary, a source of confidence as well as a source of traditional guides to practical procedures.

But living and making a living involved also relations between people. In short-range terms, any Aboriginal man and his immediate family could live off the land quite capably under normal seasonal conditions. However, the fuller round of events called for a wider range of people. This meant that the range of dependence was extended, highlighting the issues of reciprocity and responsibility for others that were the basis of group existence. The large kin-oriented structures which were usual in Aboriginal Australia had a specifically utilitarian (or socio-economic) value. They represented a buffer of a different sort, a non-mythic or non-ritual buffer, between every Aboriginal person and the demands of his physical environment. Co-operation with others was an essential part of Aboriginal semi-nomadic living. Kinship networks linked people together, in combinations that sometimes took the form of conflict but more often emphasized collaboration and mutual help. Within a certain regional span, a person could always be sure of having relatives who could more or less be relied on to take his part—not necessarily the same people in all circumstances; but there were always some to defend or support him.

The genius of traditionally-oriented Aborigines rested primarily on their ability to organize,

providing an assured though reasonably flexible programme for co-operation in everyday affairs, and a religious belief system which substantiated a life within surroundings that were familiar but full of interest and meaning. It is a mistake to believe that this life was unduly monotonous or consisted of repetitive action within a circumscribed and limited frame of belief.

It is true that traditional Aboriginal life was cast within the mould of the past; what had been proven then, or believed to have been proven, was considered to have a direct bearing on the present: the lessons learnt from the past could be applied effectively to the present and to the future, if for no other reason than that solutions to specific problems of living within the Australian environment could not be varied radically—not without risk.

Outside the dynamics of social living—in, for example, domestic relations, marriage, children growing up and being initiated, confronting the inevitability of death—outside of these, religious rituals were essentially concerned with renewal, with spiritually stimulating environmental fertility, and with sharpening intellectual faculties. In that respect, ritual provided the main stimulus to enquiry and speculation. Such enquiry took place within what can be called a closed system, but it was not entirely straight-jacketed. It nurtured and enriched the Aboriginal arts—music, song-poetry and oral literature generally, dancing, painting and sculpture. Evaluating a society or a culture solely in terms of what people do to gain a livelihood provides only a one-sided appraisal. In all human societies there are particular imperatives which cannot be evaded if survival is to be ensured. However, what people do *outside* that sphere of necessity is especially significant. As far as the Aborigines are concerned, the great mythic epics and song cycles demonstrate beyond doubt a high level of cultural attainment: they thought and felt and expressed themselves poetically in ways which were mediated not only through religion but also through ordinary living. I am reminded of what Strehlow (1971: 247) has pointed out, and others too: that anyone conversing with fully-initiated Aboriginal men “trained in speech by means of the sacred myths and songs” cannot fail to be aware that he is in the presence of men of education and culture.

Against this picture of relative harmony and environmental adjustment and intellectual development, there are inevitably many examples of human fallibility. Life could be harsh, social relations were fraught with difficulties, and the ordinary course of living was punctuated by interpersonal dissension. It was not a utopian existence. It does seem that the basic needs of Aboriginal man were reasonably satisfied, that people were able to achieve a fair degree of happiness and comfort. But limitations were imposed. Even if they were not directly recognized, they were definitely present. Independence—individual independence—was played down, or undervalued, because group co-operation was an economic necessity; and speculation

and experiment could go only so far, because the *status quo* depended on common expectations in belief and in action. In balance, however, there were more positive attributes: values related to a perceived affinity with the land, harmony with nature, co-operativeness, a love of beauty and aesthetic appreciation, a respect for the past which provided an assurance for the future, and recognition of personal rights viewed as affecting others—recognition that a person is responsible to others as those others are responsible to him. These values were either ignored or not appreciated by the European newcomers.

III

The traditional Aboriginal aspects which I have noted in summary must be taken into account if we are to appreciate the results of alien impact. They have to be understood, too, in relation to the creation of a social identity for Aborigines in today's scene.

It was this traditional world of the Aborigines which, in so many instances, received a death-blow when it came into contact with outsiders. In the southern and south-eastern areas, where European settlement expanded rapidly, it meant the complete destruction of the Aboriginal way of life and, in a number of cases, of the people themselves as well. That history is so much a part of our own that there is no need for me to sketch it out in any detail. Three points only need be mentioned.

One: there was, as soon as Aborigines realized that the aliens had come to stay, a great deal of opposition to this intrusion, especially when their lands were appropriated without reference to them and their food resources were threatened. Literally, many were obliged to fight for their very existence. But they were ill-equipped for that purpose and lacked one of the fundamental pre-requisites—that is, political strategy and an overarching institution which would have enabled them to muster a large opposition force. I said that their genius rested on organization—but not on such a large scale, and not for collective aggressive acts of offence and defence. They depended instead on skirmish and on ruse, on guerilla warfare. What occurred in the Swan River Colony between 1830-1840 bears this out, as it does in other areas. The "Battle of Pinjarra", as it has been called, was not a battle at all. The Aborigines concerned, including women and children, were not ready to fight. It was an ambush on the part of the Europeans, and there was little opportunity for any Aborigines to escape through the cross-fire of the two parties. Such instances were duplicated, in one way or another, so that capitulation was only a matter of time and was the only course open to Aborigines—not in the spirit of "if you're being licked by them, join them", but simply because no other alternative existed. In the long run, those who did survive "joined them" (that is, the Europeans).

This brings me to my second point. To "join them" meant that Aboriginal traditional life had to be considerably modified. For instance, by the 1880's, in the south-west of this State, that

traditional life had disappeared as a living, functional reality. In the process, the indigenous population was almost entirely replaced by a part-Aboriginal population—a few of them directly descended from the original local people, but most of considerably mixed Aboriginal affinity. Again, that situation was duplicated in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and so on—except, of course, in Tasmania: the story there is not all that different, only more extreme.

The third point relates to the unevenness of alien contact. Not all Aborigines were affected in this way. But eventually, as time went on, all were exposed in varying degrees to external pressures, and their reactions to these differed. However, because of this unevenness, much of traditional life survived in some areas—at first in its traditional form, but increasingly with considerable modifications. The last great socio-cultural reservoirs, so to speak, have been Arnhem Land and the Western Desert—or they were, until just after the second world war.

Wherever contact with outsiders took place, and irrespective of policies promulgated or put into action—whether on government or mission settlements, on pastoral stations, in country or "fringe" towns or in cities—wherever such contact took place, the theme of "civilizing" was emphasized: and to Europeans, "civilization" meant "Europeanization". Accordingly, Aborigines of all kinds were persuaded, directly or indirectly, to become more Europeanized, and, what was most important in this process, to learn new work patterns and adopt a new economic pattern of living. Although welfare policies varied over the years, from advocating separate development or from "smoothing the dying pillow" to inevitable assimilation, all involved increasing European control and influence—most of which ignored or discredited the importance of Aboriginal life or what remained of it. The Aborigines, so it was said, had little to offer. Europeans, on the other hand, had everything to give—but at a price. This state of imbalance was actively encouraged, and coloured virtually all of Aboriginal-European interaction. It developed a pronounced state of dependence. It also had repercussions which have extended into the present-day scene. What emerged from this—with only a few, very few, exceptions—was that the Aborigines were reduced to an almost invisible, almost inaudible, segment of the Australian population. The radical diminishing of their independence, the removal of land from their control, the downgrading of religious belief: all of these, along with others, led inevitably to their socio-cultural impoverishment.

In the "outside world", being of Aboriginal descent had no positive value at all, only a negative one. The hard road toward a "new" culture with its new social implications was strewn with obstacles, tangible and intangible, which most Aborigines were unable to overcome. There is no need for me to spell this out, and in relation to specific local groups the space-time component varied considerably. For instance, although this state of affairs existed

almost from the onset of alien contact, it is still observable today in a number of country towns in Western Australia, among other places. Opportunities for breaking this vicious circle are much greater now, but the process is still a traumatic and difficult one for the people concerned. The extension of Australian citizenship to Aborigines came only gradually, and for a long time meant very little to them. Special regulations affecting them were originally designed to protect and safeguard them, as a people in special need of protection and guidance, but too often they became almost ends in themselves. Welfare and advancement ideals became bogged down in a welter of prohibitions. And it was only too clear that protective policies were not there solely to protect Aborigines; they were also designed, or used, to protect non-Aboriginal interests. I won't speak of exploitation in this respect, except to say that it was not only present but was also actively encouraged in a number of instances—especially in some pastoral areas of the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory, as well as elsewhere.

The problems *vis-à-vis* Aborigines, resulting on one hand from external contact and on the other from their own attempts to sustain rapidly changing traditional patterns—these problems ramified and could not be resolved without drastic action which, in turn, had further repercussions. To mention only three of these: (a) economic deprivation; (b) restricted educational opportunities and restricted opportunities for acquisition of basic skills; and (c) the eroding influence of drinking to excess. These issues alone were sufficient to define the Aborigines' position within the wider community; (a) and (b) were complementary, one upholding and reinforcing the other. Low socio-economic status confined groups of Aborigines to particular urban settings, or forced them to the fringes of country towns. This set up or augmented social barriers which already existed in other forms, and which only a few of them were able to cross. The same was the case in the north. For example, on pastoral stations the Aboriginal camps were spatially separate from the areas in which Europeans resided. On government and mission reserves, the same patterns were visible. People living in such conditions were caught in a trap of increasing—*conspicuously* increasing—poverty and squalor. The only Aborigines who escaped were those who still remained traditionally-oriented.

The problems of housing which in recent years have received so much publicity as a primary symptom of Aboriginal deprivation, were and are only part of this wider syndrome. Lack of communication between Aborigines and other Australians was, and is, perhaps much more significant. The school was for a long time, and still is in many cases, an outstanding example of minimal communication, and of puzzlement on the part of educational authorities as to how to remedy that situation. The remedy, of course, did not lie in tackling only one aspect and leaving the rest in a kind of social vacuum, as was often the case in the

immediate past. The approach had to be—should have been—in terms of the total configuration: but this has only recently been possible, and then only up to a point.

Among other things, the continuing influence of drinking to excess, which over the years of contact has become virtually endemic—or, to put it in another way, has become patterned behaviour linked to particular positive values that were or are regarded by many Aborigines as being desirable and part of an expected way of life—that state of affairs has become, as more opportunities are offered to people of Aboriginal descent, an inhibiting or retarding factor. The "right to drink", which so many of us supported in the 1950's (and probably would still support on the platform of equality), can, in perspective, be viewed as one of the most obvious ingredients in social and moral deterioration. The present situation at Kalgoorlie, at Wiluna, or in Derby, Wyndham, and Alice Springs, for example, underlines that point. Even more disastrous is the situation at Gove in north-eastern Arnhem Land, near the new town of Nhulunbhuy, or at Oenpelli in western Arnhem Land. The solution does not lie in "teaching Aborigines to drink" or in gaoling Aborigines for drunkenness, but in education and rehabilitation. And, of course, it cannot be isolated from the picture of what is happening in the wider Australian scene—the patterns of expected and actual behaviour among Australians in general. This issue has not yet been seriously tackled by State or Commonwealth authorities. It is tempting, at this juncture, to comment on Aborigines and the law. I shall not do so, except to say that legal representation is by no means all that is required. It is true that negative discrimination against Aborigines is apparent in this sphere, even though virtually all prejudicial legislation in this respect has been lifted. The problems involved are not simply within the courts; they are to be found embedded in social situations, the informal, human situations in which people of Aboriginal descent are involved.

Many of the conditions I have mentioned stem at least to some extent from the past: but they have their repercussions in the present, and influence future trends. Changing them in a positive sense means re-programming or re-directing the course of events. And to know what to do in this respect requires, initially, research. This is or should be a significant component in all welfare developmental programmes, but the need for it is being recognized far too slowly. In any re-programming, account must be taken of what can be called "the Aboriginal heritage". Broadly, it has two inter-related facets. One concerns the "*traditional, specifically Aboriginal heritage*". This is relevant in different ways to all Aborigines, whether they remain traditionally-oriented (as some still are) or are to all intents and purposes ordinary Australians (that is, culturally speaking). Secondly, there is the traumatic history of past and near-present contact. Ideas about this are communicable to on-coming generations. I mean,

here, views and feelings related to being an Aboriginal, being defined as an Aboriginal person, by oneself or by others, in a society dominated by non-Aborigines: restrictions on access to potential advantages, restricted opportunities; and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour. In combination, the two facets of the Aboriginal heritage provide a formidable emotional frame against which to measure virtually the total range of experience, from adaptation and acceptance to opposition and rejection.

IV

The break with older, negative policies and attitudes did not really get under way until just after the second world war. The main motivators were not, at first, Aborigines themselves. But these motivators did include anthropologists. The nature of their work, which involved intimate and sustained relationships with Aborigines, placed them in a strategic position. They were, simultaneously, both preservationalists and activists, concerned with recording and understanding socio-cultural life in its traditional perspective as well as under conditions of extreme change; and they were also concerned with the implications of what they observed in relation to human aspirations, human dignity, and human satisfactions.

The first effective and systematic anthropological field research did not take place until the late 1920's and early 1930's. At that time, when Aboriginal opinion was largely inarticulate, anthropologists (and there were only a few of them) served as intermediaries between Aborigines and administrations, as well as missionaries. At that time, they were almost the only people other than Aborigines themselves who had any real knowledge of what was happening in Aboriginal areas and what Aborigines felt about it. I do not, of course, want to underestimate the influence of welfare agencies. What I am saying refers to social-scientific knowledge. Without anthropologists (plus a very few missionaries and others), virtually no information about Aboriginal life in the immediate past would be available today—and not just in reference to traditional life. Without them, our understanding of present-day conditions would be considerably limited. And, as you will realize, the collection of such material has a direct bearing on contemporary ideas about social identity. This aside, anthropologists have influenced administrative policy at all levels. Moreover, they were instrumental in achieving an almost complete reversal of the older, outmoded policies, as well as helping to turn public opinion toward a more positive appreciation of Aborigines and their culture. This is no exaggeration: it is a matter of history, as yet unwritten.

However, this development must be seen in context, and in relation to current socio-cultural trends within the wider Australian society. The first major break-through occurred with the establishment, during the last war, of army settlements in the Northern Territory. There,

Aborigines came into close contact with a variety of different kinds of Australians—and not just administrators and missionaries, station-managers, stockmen, and so on. Conditions on those settlements were in marked contrast to what existed in their "home" areas. A wage economy was introduced, whereas on many pastoral stations at that time no such payments were available. Army settlements provided housing, showers, latrines, beds and other amenities: on the stations, humpies and huts, and "native camps" were the norm, usually relegated to the local creek bed or some such site. Additionally, the local Aborigines were viewed by the owners and managers of many stations as part of the natural environment, which was there for them to exploit.

Movement outside the confines of such stations and other settlements brought growing awareness among Aborigines themselves of barriers blocking social and spatial mobility where they were concerned. This same upsurge of interest was apparent also in the towns and in the cities, where persons of Aboriginal descent were becoming more vocal, and as a result more visible. A movement had begun which increased in momentum, and brought in its train radical policy changes. A number of years were to elapse before the majority of Aborigines felt its impact. However, in contrast to what had been going on before, those changes were very rapid indeed; and eventually, with varying degrees of effectiveness, they succeeded in partially rechannelling the course of events.

It was in this new climate of opinion and unrest that the ideal of assimilation was forged as far as Australia was concerned, although of course it had been suggested before. Its original premise rested on non-discrimination and on equal opportunities within the wider Australian society for all people of Aboriginal descent. It assumed that traditional Aboriginal life would become a thing of the past, and that socio-economic viability could be achieved through some effort on the part of all those involved and through common consensus. However, the history of past contact militated against that ideal, at least for a substantial part of the Aboriginal population. Contrary forces were at work; and social protest, which previously had been regionally confined and easily dissipated, crystallized and took on wider political significance. At the same time, the Aboriginal population explosion became much less localized than it had seemed to be at first. Spatial mobility increased, there was a stepping-up of educational programmes, and, most importantly, the gradual shaping of a new identity. Recognizing that attitudes and aspirations were changing in these directions, the assimilation aim was officially modified in 1965 to permit a greater emphasis to be placed on traditional Aboriginal culture.

From that point in time, there was no turning back. At the administrative level, further far-reaching changes took place—but not without the prodding of social protest (see R. Berndt 1971: 25-43). Social Service benefits for all

Aborigines, and the right to vote and to drink intoxicating liquor, were introduced unevenly among the States. The Pastoral Award, designed to come into effect in the Northern Territory by 1968, had to be moved forward to 1966 because of the Guirindji (Wave Hill) strike. In 1967, as you all know, a Referendum was held which concerned, on one hand, the inclusion of all Aborigines in the Commonwealth Census and, on the other, the assignment of powers to the Commonwealth to enable it to legislate for Aborigines. As it was framed then, in its two ambiguous questions on which the Australian public went to the poll, the implications were not clear; they have become much clearer over the years.

Policy became more realistic and more reflective of what was happening in the various Aboriginal communities themselves. It was also more receptive to the demands of protest. Of these, two outstanding cases of recent years—the Guirindji sequence, and the Gove Land Rights dispute—had the greatest public and political repercussions. The first, in the Wave Hill pastoral area, concerned employment and independence, coupled with land rights. The other, at Gove, in north-eastern Arnhem Land, was more far-reaching in its significance. It was a direct attack on mining exploitation in that area, which was regarded as taking place at the expense of local Aborigines; and in the litigation which followed, the Aborigines confronted the combined opposition of the Nabalco mining complex and the Commonwealth government. The Aborigines sought to establish ownership of “tribal” lands within the context of Australian law. We all know about the negative judgement in this long-drawn-out case. One of the first tasks of the present Federal government was to establish an Aboriginal Land Rights Commission—not to debate the legal question of whether or not land rights should be given, but to determine how they should be given, and to whom (that is, to what groups of Aborigines).

External intervention and stimulus were apparent in both of these instances—in bringing the issues to a head, in sustaining public attention, and in instigating political action. Further, the issues were raised at a particularly opportune time, when the public was receptive, and when the “Aboriginal cause” was considered to be worth taking up. Aborigines had become good politics, and had attained respectability. But this creation of a congenial atmosphere, with its encouraging possibilities for better conditions, had been preceded by a multitude of processions, sit-ins, student involvement and other forms of protest. A lot of hard work in these and other directions had already gone into it, on the part of Aborigines and non-Aborigines. The Canberra “Embassy” was a highlight of this series, which effectively, in its repercussions, dissipated any hard, overt resistance to Aboriginal rights writ large. It was followed by other manifestations, such as the North Adelaide tent and the Western Australian Parliament Stone (which, incidentally, remains unresolved). By this time, the public had “got the message”, and people of

Aboriginal descent had firmed up their aspirations. However, as I have said, many of these protests were taken up or actively encouraged by non-Aborigines—for valid reasons, because Aborigines were, collectively speaking, disadvantaged. They were also taken up for political and other reasons, and this has been quite apparent in a number of instances.

A measure of the importance of Aboriginal affairs today is what could well be called the “bandwagon approach”. A large number of people, drawn from various academic disciplines as well as from the non-professional public, became involved. What most had in common was an ignorance of Aborigines and Aboriginal life, as well as of the problems of change facing these people. It stimulated consultant firms to mount government-sponsored surveys, which meant big money for their personnel.

The truth of the matter was (and is) that many Aborigines were not always in a position to act for themselves, and this was specially the case in northern areas, though much less so in the south. This meant that they were, and often still are, vulnerable and subject to manipulation. That phase is gradually passing, or, rather, is being redirected into different hands. There is always a danger in this respect, for all peoples—but more so when a people like the Aborigines are concerned, a people who are struggling for equal rights and opportunities and for an effective voice in their own affairs.

V

The public was receptive. In one sense, we can speak of the Aborigines being re-discovered by other Australians (see C. Berndt 1969: 16-34). Often what was sought was a highly romantic picture of traditional Aboriginal life, an encapsulation of exotic elements which could be translated and transformed by novelists, poets, artists, musicians, dancers, and so on. But that transformation, when it was made, had little resemblance to the reality of traditional life; and they used it, not so much to understand it, as to provide an extra dimension to their own work.

Counterbalancing this trend were the hard-core anthropological and social scientific studies which were reasonably objective and had an entirely different aim. Research meant learning for a purpose, not just idle curiosity, and not solely for academic ends. In this way, anthropologists not only provided a detailed record of living traditional life, but explored all aspects of change wherever persons of Aboriginal descent were to be found—in the bush or in the city, to note only two contrasts. What they learned could be applied in relation to Aboriginal advancement. This research was appreciably stimulated by the establishment in 1961 of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, which sponsors a wide range of research. Then came the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs (as it is now called), which is specifically concerned with welfare-oriented research. Additionally, there are the universities, and the

State departments of Aboriginal welfare and planning.

It is within this frame of research that, increasingly, contemporary social issues are being reviewed. There is no need for me to emphasize the significance of all this, except to repeat, what I seem to have said so often: that we cannot afford to neglect learning more about the society in which we live, and becoming better informed about the various forces that are at work within it. A "commonsense" approach based on one's own experience is inadequate: it can lead, as it has done in the past, to more difficulties. And, as part of this broader scene, though only one part of it, an anthropological and social scientific approach to the understanding of problems facing persons of Aboriginal descent is essential if we seek their ultimate well-being.

If other Australians have re-discovered the Aborigines, people of Aboriginal descent are now engaged in the process of re-discovering themselves.

This is not so much the case among traditionally-oriented Aborigines, especially now that policy changes have provided them with an opportunity to sustain and maintain substantial areas of their own culture. The extent to which this will be possible is another matter, and it seems to be a highly selective business—particularly when it is supported by, for example, the Australian Council for the Arts through its Advisory Committee on the Aboriginal Arts; or by official emphasis on being taught in and through their own vernacular languages, with only hazy ideas about the kind of content that this could entail as far as their traditional culture is concerned. How much of that culture can survive, and for what functional reasons, is a subject I shall not go into here—although it is crucial to this particular issue. Opportunities do exist: but it is also true to say that what will survive will be radically different from what it was in the purely Aboriginal situation—and what there was before cannot be artificially resuscitated.

The process of people of Aboriginal descent re-discovering themselves, is something else again. Out of a long history of dependence and subordination, paternalism and protection, maltreatment and neglect, and even worse—out of all of that and more, has arisen a resentment which has become increasingly pronounced. This has resulted, as I have said, in protest—some of it mild, some of it aggressive. And it is within this context that the new image of Aboriginality is being formed. This has been projected on to the wider Australian community in two ways.

One takes the form of demands that people of Aboriginal descent should be able to make decisions for themselves about their own affairs, and the corollary (insisted on by some of them) that nobody else should be allowed to do so. This has stimulated the emergence of Aboriginal spokesmen and leaders on the State and national levels. In this respect, the southern urbanized people of Aboriginal descent have had a considerable influence. The other, related to the

first, is manifested in a concern for cultural preservation and Aboriginal revival. A wave of feeling for "Aboriginal" identity—which could eventually lead to pan-Aboriginality—seeks to establish a common socio-cultural heritage. It is the "idea" of traditional Aboriginal life which is used for this purpose—and not the reality of what was once traditional semi-nomadic existence. This has been expressed through highlighting Aboriginal religious features, especially in regard to secret-sacred material and sacred sites, "law-carriers" or "elders" and male authority in the ritual sphere. With this has come, or has been more clearly stated, justification for land ownership, and not necessarily in economic terms, but in terms of the spiritual and emotional linkages which were pivotal features of traditional life. It is, in fact, a pseudo-renaissance.

It is important not to underestimate the significance of the movement toward Aboriginal identity, because this is used to define persons of Aboriginal descent in contrast to non-Aborigines. It may also be framed in terms of "moderates" versus "extremists"—Black Theatre as a medium of protest, versus Black Power; or, put simply, "Black" versus "White". Views are hardening, as one might expect them to do—always bearing in mind the history of Aboriginal emergence as a political force in Australian society. That identity, whatever its outward manifestation, has political implications; and Aborigines are well aware of these, as is the current Federal government. Within that picture is Aboriginal identity as a positive expression of a pride in being Aboriginal and in having a common background, however far that may be removed from the actualities of the past. That identity must be seen in a dual sense, as having something to do with the traditional past and also something to do with the struggle for equality, against what appeared at times to be insurmountable odds. Such an identity can help to provide emotional security and a sense of belonging which, outside the traditional Aboriginal scene, has been sadly lacking. This is probably one of the most significant developments that have taken place over the years—much more important, in my view, than the upsurge of political awareness which, however, can be viewed as part of it.

Contrasts between "Black" and "White" are becoming increasingly irrelevant and outmoded in this present-day world, in spite of numerous examples to the contrary. Such catchwords point to supposed physical characteristics and say little about mental ability and cultural attainment. Further, they point to political discrimination and to prejudice from either side of the ethnic fence. Such contrasts are not anthropologically sound, and they never were. As far as the Australian Aborigines are concerned, they are not "black", even the darkest of them in the northern coastal regions. What does make good sense, anthropologically, is cultural diversity and the sustaining of particular heritages.

The "new" Aborigines—and I use that term generally to refer to all those persons who are

of Aboriginal descent or who identify themselves in that way—the new Aborigines are in a position, and have not hesitated, to carve out for themselves a particular niche in Australian society, and in the process to develop an identity which should, ideally, symbolize two features: (1) a distinctive contribution to Australian society generally and (2) a particular way of tackling their own problems and their own projects. By this last, I mean that so many projects which are being set up today are stimulated from the “outside”, and their organization and motivations are in fact non-Aboriginal. Their aim is to achieve socio-economic viability in both short and long range terms. But just because these may be run or operated by persons of Aboriginal descent, that does not automatically make them “Aboriginal”. They must also be fitted into a particular ethos, into a particular framework of ideas which could be defined as Aboriginal. Aboriginal identity, and what is meant by that label, could provide that ethos.

It is within this context, as in others, that research—especially anthropological research—becomes vitally significant. As far as Aborigines are concerned, systematic research is needed into all aspects of Aboriginal life: traditional, and in terms of current and past changes, and in relation to all conditions of living wherever these are to be found. It is necessary to have a detailed understanding of a large range of social situations, so that that knowledge can be applied practically. I am not, here, emphasizing its significance in purely professional terms: that is another matter. I am concerned, though, that the results of such work should be available to all who are involved in Aboriginal advancement, including Aborigines themselves. For one thing, a meaningful framework for social identity can be sustained only through such knowledge.

Various administrative policies and their translation into action must rest on a firm basis of understanding what is being done and what can result from it. Too often, in my experience, such research has been ignored, or hasty surveys by commercially-oriented research consultants have been made and ventures initiated with little or no awareness of what the possible implications might be for the people themselves. The States and the Commonwealth have both erred in this respect. Human beings are too valuable a commodity to be treated so brusquely. It is not money alone which will transform the Aboriginal scene. Rather, that hinges on how money is spent; and how it is spent should rest

on systematic research, with proper attention to the needs and wishes of the people involved. They require personal attention, and local situations require local consideration. In regard to the last, centralization in respect to Canberra or elsewhere, almost inevitably overshadows local perspectives. It can spell impersonalization. It also means that more controls are likely to be imposed—together with more stress on uniformity and less on diversity, which (within a certain range) is a necessary aspect of ordinary living. Anthropologically, cultural diversity has almost an intrinsic value of its own, as something which is of immense importance to mankind, just as are individual variations. In relation to people, centralization could mean less, or less effective, management in their own affairs.

This point is quite vital. Aborigines are only now being really involved in processes of decision-making. Only now are alternative choices available to them. There are different ways of achieving similar goals; and those different ways, or the choices relevant to them, should be kept open. Moreover, a reasonable choice from among a range of possible alternatives can be made only if the persons involved are aware of the consequences. One of the major tasks of the social sciences is to supply that information in a form which can be used by people who do not have particular training in that direction. It is the responsibility of all Aboriginal administrative agencies to seek out that knowledge and to apply it. And it is to the advantage of all Aborigines to be able to draw on such knowledge. Hopefully, also, more Aborigines will come to have a greater appreciation of social science research, in its theoretical as well as its applied aspects, and some of them will themselves carry out such research, not only among their own people but in the wider Australian scene and beyond.

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